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IV.—*How far should our Teaching and Text-books have a Scientific Basis?*

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AT a meeting of Natural Science Men, held a couple of years ago at Berlin, the question which I have proposed to ourselves was discussed. Much to the surprise of the adherents of Darwinism, Prof. Virchow maintained, that the doctrine of Darwin should not be taught in any institution lower than the University, that it should not enter the text-book of natural history used in a school of any grade from the *volks schule* up to the Gymnasium and Realschule. I am not able to judge whether Virchow's view is too conservative in the field of natural science. But it is possible in any branch of learning to set before students theories and generalizations when they ought to be fed upon the old, hard and dry facts and laws. This method is the more vicious; the newer these theories and the vaguer these generalizations. But when the latest results consist of new facts and new laws of language well established, conservatism in the adoption and in the teaching of them becomes a great fault and a great injustice. I admit, that there is danger in going too fast and too far in adopting and teaching the new results, but in the department of Modern Languages as in many other departments the danger lies in the other direction, not merely in ultra-conservatism in appropriating and digesting the new results, not merely in ignoring them, but in unpremeditated, unconscious, down right ignorance of them.

I am ready to lay down and defend the following proposition: All teaching should start from a strictly scientific basis, and all aids in teaching, the text-books, reference books, etc., should be constructed upon a strictly scientific basis.

It may seem to some of you that I am re-asserting what nobody denies, and want to defend what nobody attacks. But let us not be deceived :

1. There are plenty of Classical Philologists—claiming to be the philologists par excellence, sneering at the same time at Comparative Philology and its results—who deny that there is a scientific basis to Modern Philology. They assert, that the study of Modern Languages is hardly worthy of the serious pursuit of students and investigators.

2. There are many, who may not deny the claim of a science to the study of Modern Language, but they do not care whether it is or not. They want to learn how to read or to speak a little French or German or Italian, because the ability to do so is of great value to them. They are the utilitarians taking the “bread and butter view” of our study. Even if they are the devotees of another science, they do not hesitate to put themselves on a level with the merchant and the traveller, who want a little French and German, “just enough to get along, you know.” They do not object to learning even “a little Latin and less Greek,” because the vocabulary of their branch of learning is largely made up of words derived from Latin and Greek.

3. There are even teachers of modern languages, who do not realize, that their department is a science. They teach at random, some with a text-book, some without any. At best they satisfy the utilitarian’s demands, and even this they could do better, if they took a strictly scientific starting-point.

I believe, therefore, that I am not asserting the obvious, when I declare that our department *is* a science, and that its teaching must be carried on accordingly.

Were this proposition accepted, it would not be very difficult to fix the extent, to which the latest results reached in our science should be taught in the class-room or—what amounts to the same thing—how far these results should be embodied in the text-books. In fact, were our Association not as limited as it is—for very good reasons, to be sure—and were our papers intended to be brought before the general public, I am not sure but it would be worth our while to state the reasons, why our department is a science. But among us this will hardly be necessary. I need only recall such names as ten Brink, Sweet, Skeat, Scherer, the father of the “Jung grammatiker,” tho Saturn-like he would now devour his own children, Sievers, Paul, Verner, Braune, Kluge, Gröber, Tobler, Förster, Neumann. We recognize these men as the foremost among those who have developed within the last fifteen years the old humdrum,

empirical treatment of living languages into the scientific study of them of to-day. They have done even more than that. Investigating the phenomena of *living* languages they have reached results which are valuable contributions to the science of language and comparative philology. They have started a new branch of philology, viz., Phonetics, invented new methods of investigation, and gained deep insight into the nature of language—I refer to Paul's *Principien der Sprachzehlhte*. These men are modern-language-men. They are Professors of either English, German or French (excepting Sweet) in England and Germany. And yet we are told, that these men and we, their pupils and humble followers, have no science as the basis and the goal of our endeavors!

Let us be bold enough to take for granted that we have a science and inquire now, why and how we should resort to this science in our teaching.

Let me give first a few reasons why:

1. By basing our instruction and text-books upon a scientific ground-work, our department and our profession gain dignity and weight. It has been often remarked, with how much justice I do not care to discuss that the still prevailing method of teaching Latin and Greek is old-fashioned, stale and stereotyped. The trouble with our teaching of modern languages is, that it is loose, random, unsystematic. This trouble is partly due to the fact, that our students come to us with such various objects in view. One wants to *speak* French only, the other to *read* it only, and only Prose at that, so that he can read French scientific books and journals. The third wants to study it thoroughly, the fourth wants its literature and its philology. We naturally vary our methods in teaching these groups of students. But we can go too far in this. The student who wants only to speak French, that is, to acquire a couple hundred phrases and a vocabulary to talk about the weather and all kinds of "small talk," has little claim upon the instructor in a high-school, college or university. Even the *natural method* can hardly save him at his age. He should have begun in the nursery, when the mother as the "bonne" was all in all to him, primer, grammar, dictionary and literature. We cannot bring back to him in our class-rooms the conditions in which the *natural method* is the only proper one. The *natural* method can have no claim upon us. I distinguish between the natural and the *oral* method, which combined with

grammar and exercises, is the best preparation for acquiring a speaking knowledge. It is even quite feasible to accustom a large class to the spoken word and train the *ear* as well as the *eye*. But the *natural* method we cannot use. For all other methods the ground-work should be scientific. I mean by that, that for instance the systems of inflection which the students learn should be such as can be traced to older systems, and be compared with those of related languages. Even if the student never study the language in its older periods, and only wants to acquire ability to read ordinary prose, the lowest purpose any one can have. As another instance, taken from German, the terminology should be scientific, though we never go so far as to study the nature and history of Ablaut, Umlaut and other phonetic laws, the scientific terms can be used in the most elementary section of the grammar.

A scientific basis dignifies our profession. I do not wish to hurt any body's feelings, or bite off my own nose—for I am a foreigner myself—but our calling suffers from a large number of foreign-born teachers, who have never gone through any course of preparation and training for their work. The foreigner too often knows English very imperfectly, is a violent advocate of the natural method and takes to teaching, because he thinks he is naturally fitted for teaching his mother-tongue. The American teacher too often neglects the phonetics of the foreign tongue, teaches German or French because he has happened to sojourn a while in Germany or France, or because in the department for which he has really prepared himself abroad, there happens to be no vacancy at home. In short, the feeling is, *any body* can teach French or German or what is just as dangerous, *any body* can teach English. By introducing scientific methods, we shall show before very long that every body cannot so teach, that the teacher must be as specially and as scientifically trained for his work in our department as well as in any other.

2. A scientific basis for our instruction and text-books is easiest, even for the beginner and for the student, who never goes farther into the language than is usually required in college or for admission to college. The so-called "practical" arrangements are often so fanciful, the rules so weighed down with exceptions, the groupings so arbitrary, that even with the large amount of exercises after the Ollendorffian system, the student might as well learn the inflection of each noun and each verb

by itself. When the student advances to the elective and maximum courses of the college, and to the historical and comparative work of the university, the advantage of the scientific ground-work of his elementary course is apparent to every instructor able to conduct higher studies.

3. A scientific basis affords a valuable discipline, otherwise, not attained from the study of a living language. There is a great deal of prejudice still on this score against our department, strongest, perhaps, against the study of English. But the prejudice that if any discipline is to be gained from the study of languages, Greek and Latin are *the* ones to be studied, has been shaken somewhat of late. But I want to say frankly that I cannot go the whole length that some of us and representatives of other departments have gone in the opposition to Greek and Latin. Our friends representing the Romance languages and English cannot do without Latin under any circumstances.

I am not in favor of throwing Greek overboard and taking on any amount of Modern Language to replace it. I always feel misgivings when we speak of a modern language as "replacing," as a "substitute for," or as an "equivalent of" Greek. But I do think, that French "*im aller weitsten Sinn*" scientifically studied, is worth as a disciplinary study, any amount of the old-fashioned syntactical gymnastics, which generally stands for Latin or Greek.

When "English" meant, and too often still means a certain amount of orthœpy, elocution, style and literature, when we teach French and German as if they were accomplishments like dancing, fencing, or final touches to be put on (to) young ladies in their seminaries at an extra charge, and on (to) young gentlemen, who have not brains enough to get into college, our department is justly charged with affording no mental discipline. Let "English" mean as it should and as it is bound to mean more and more, the historical scientific study of the language, Beowulf and Chaucer. Let "German" for students of the grade with which we have mainly to do mean an intelligent acquisition of its sounds, a drill in the various laws of its phonology, Ablaut, Umlaut, Grimm's Law, English and German correspondences and cognates, syntactical analysis of Lessing's and Schiller's Prose, and of the difficult parts of Faust and of Nathan der Weise, the reading of the masterpieces of German literature, speaking and writing the language, and we claim without pre-

sumption, that the discipline acquired by going through such courses, while *different* from the discipline afforded by the study of Greek is not *inferior* to it. More than that. Two sides of this discipline Greek cannot afford at all, viz.:

1. That gained from the exact analysis and reproduction of foreign sounds or in the case of English of the Old English pronunciation. The Greek and Latin sounds are difficult to reconstruct.

2. That gained from so entering into the spirit of a foreign language as to be able not merely to appreciate its best literature which is the utmost attained in studying Greek, but to speak the language, to think in it, live in it, dream in it. Is it logical to claim that it trains the mental powers to reproduce the ancient Latin and to deny this to the reproduction of Neo-Latin? I have taken for granted that our department is a science and tried to give some reasons, *why* our instruction should have a scientific basis.

I will now briefly return to the question how far the latest scientific results shall enter our instruction. It seems clear, that when the results are pretty safely established, we should make use of them. They may not have been generally accepted yet. We cannot always wait for that. We *must* keep abreast of the latest research and sift its results. Every department will have its own tests.

In English and German, I think that Grassmann's and Verner's investigations, which have explained the two large groups of exceptions to Grimm's Law, should be made use of. I should leave alone all speculations about the cause and starting-point of the General Teutonic shifting, but the facts of Grimm's Law, including those of Verner's Law, ought to be taught. It is to be regretted that Sweet in his Anglo-Saxon Primer and Reader does not state the laws in the Phonology. He says, "s becomes r in the preterite plurals and past participles of strong verbs; th—d under the same conditions." Of course, these transitions take place according to Verner's Law, and why not state it? A student does not get that clear-cut impression from such separate statements of facts as Sweet gives. In the very next paragraph, he says, "r is often transposed," which means the transposition of r is no law. But the student ought to be made to understand clearly the difference between such an unexplained sporadic change as this and the interchange of s—r, th—d,

which *must* take place, if there is such a thing as Verner's Law in the Teutonic Languages, which no one yet has ventured to gain say. In my opinion, there is nothing more stimulative of thinking and investigating than this conviction, that phonetic laws like physical laws, are not liable to unexplainable exceptions.

Of very few laws, it is true, *all* exceptions have been accounted for, but if the laws are firmly established and apparent exceptions are still unexplained, the greater is the benefit derived from studying and applying them. The fruitful work that has lately been done upon ablaut and accent can be made to tell in our treatment of strong verbs and word formation in a modern language, without shooting over the heads of students and entering too much into comparative philology. The strong-verb-classes should be based upon the now well established ablaut series. It is a mistake to expect students of college grade to learn the strong verbs individually and separately. They are learned more easily in the groups, into which they naturally fall according to their ablaut.

In conclusion, I will mention a very important subject, concerning which we ought, in my opinion, to teach the latest results, viz.: Phonetics. The analysis and synthesis of sounds is no mean branch of General Philology, though poohed at by many philologists. It certainly forms a large part of our work. We ought to employ above all the analysis of vowels by their articulation and not by the effect upon the ear, according to the Bell-Sweet system, now also adopted by Sievers. Persons from 14 to 20 years old ought not to be expected to learn foreign sounds by the almost unconscious imitation, proper enough in the nursery. Sounds can be acquired without knowing the movements of the organs of speech, just as I can raise my arm without knowing the movements of muscles. But by scientific instruction we can save time, and attain an accuracy otherwise never reached by adults. Think also of the large number of our students who have no aptitude for acquiring new sounds. By imitation alone they never acquire them. If we teach them the articulation according to a scientific system, it is possible to redeem some from their awkwardness and helplessness.